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In and Beyond the Faith: Religion as a Determinant of Women's Civic Activity. A Case of Women's Protest Against the Tightening of Abortion Law

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Abstract

This article is based on empirical research conducted as part of a wider research project on active citizenship. In the article, I present the civic activity of women subjected to a quantitative analysis against the background of a specific factor, which is religion (specifically Christianity). The article presents the civic activity of women, manifested by street protests undertaken after the tightening of the abortion law in Poland in 2020. The research material was collected using CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview); the sample size was $N = 585$. The obtained empirical data confirm that religion determines views on abortion and motives for participation in protests.

Keywords: religion, women, protest, civic activity.

Religion is neither true nor false, it merely proposes a way of life.

Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt

Protest as a type of civic activity

Civic activity is the foundation of civil society and the key to the democratization of political life (Burnell & Calvert, 2004; Coppedge, 2012; Wilson, 2023). The degree of civic activism reflects the quality and strength of democracy; expands pluralism policy and inclusion of the public sphere; it is also an indicator of egalitarianism, the rule of law, liberties, and civil rights. Civic activity is the basis of a democratic order in which citizens who are free, equal, and aware of their citizenship (Çelik, 2020) have the opportunity to influence state policy, co-decide on matters concerning the general public, and articulate the needs and pursue the interests of the civic community. As full members of society, they share in public power that may interfere with their lives (Berlin, 1994), but at the same time, this power can never violate human rights or the legal foundations of citizenship such as the presumption of innocence, non-retroactivity, and separation of powers (Constant, 2016). Civic activity can be a remedy for the polarization of society, privatization, appropriation of discourse, and various types of authoritarianism (Edwards, 2020). Civic activity is not monolithic – it has different types, scales and is subject to different visions (Rosales, 2023). However, regardless of the typology, it essentially consists of the rational, legal, and effective use of the rights and dispositions that result from the privilege of being a citizen in order to multiply socio-cultural capital and expand civic networks (Putnam, 1995; Putnam, 2008; Barber, 1984). It is primarily about expanding the civil sector, which consists of non-state institutions, non-governmental organizations, associations, and civic movements, as well as all other social structures independent of the state budget, remaining beyond open or hidden political control, cut off from the influence of lobbying or monopolizing groups. Civic activity is pro-social activity which is aimed at the creation and strengthening of the fabric of civil society. These are voluntary and intentional actions that confirm the fact of belonging to a civic community, while at the same time

conditioning its existence. Piotr Gliński and Hanna Palska define civic activity as a conscious and communal action aimed at articulating, implementing, and defending the interests, needs, and aspirations of a social group by members of that group (1997, p. 365). The key aspect of this definition is the rationality of the actions taken and their communal nature. These activities are collective and concern the interests of separate social groups, which means that civic activity can take many different forms, manifestations, and types. The scope of this activity includes, above all, activities that enable the formation of civic identity and fulfill typical civic functions, such as controlling the actions of the authorities, articulating the interests of a social group, and expressing opposition to the decisions of the authorities. Civic activity consists of the active participation of individuals or compact social groups in the public sphere and its transformation, making it more open and accessible to all (Fraser, 1990). The public sphere becomes a social arena in which citizens undertake specific types of actions: “it may be a demonstration by a single man on a street corner informing passers-by about the purpose of this individual demonstration, a protest march, a strike, a charity fundraiser, a field mass, collecting signatures under a petition, or organizing spontaneous help for accident victims,” (Wnuk-Lipiński, 2008, p. 104). Participation is understood here in different ways: as a more or less institutionalized participation of various social entities in the process of managing the public sphere. And also as a practical manifestation of democracy and proof of the existence of a civil society, where all free and equal citizens have the right to co-decide about the fate of the political community to which they belong, and to shape the sociopolitical order in accordance with the will of this community.

Protest is a special type of civic activity. Protest actions can be considered in two contexts. Firstly, as an objection to an action, someone’s decision, or circumstances that are perceived by the protesters as threatening, harmful or inappropriate for social, economic, religious or moral reasons. Secondly, as an attempt to introduce new or additional norms and values, to rebuild the social order, or initiate social change. Protest is a form of contestation, the aim of which is to bring about or stop changes within institutionalized power relations. To achieve this, bodies, symbols, identities, practices, and

discourses are used (Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004, as cited in Porta & Diani, 2009, p. 183). The main purpose of the protest is to challenge the decisions of the authorities when negotiation practices, mediation, or compromise fail. A protest allows you to present your views in a spectacular and non-routine way, but it requires effort and self-discipline among the protesters. It is also necessary to mobilize key social actors. The ability to mobilize is an indicator of citizenship – the higher and stronger the mobilization, the stronger the civic resources and networks. Emotions and motivations play a huge mobilizing role (Cinali & Vasilopoulos, 2015), which spurs civic potential into action, builds morale among protesters, integrates protesting people, and reassures them of the rightness of their beliefs and intentions. For the needs of the protest, emotions can be evoked and regulated (“playing on emotions”), which makes the potential participant of the protest vulnerable to the influence of the group, the organizer and leader of the event, and the media that accompany it. The channels of organization and notification in the protest are usually informal - information is distributed primarily within those circles that are involved or interested in the case (which of course does not mean that it does not reach others and does not mobilize others to act). The language of protest is radical and emotive, expressed in the form of emotionally charged formulas (e.g. colloquialisms, hyperboles, euphemisms, metaphors) – with a clearly oriented demand for change or opposition to the existing situation.

As Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik point out, the protest can be understood through the prism of four theoretical approaches that explain its origins, intensity, and forms. These are: 1) relative deprivation, i.e. the feeling of a lack of resources or lack of access, which results in the growing dissatisfaction of a society, a sense of injustice and injustice expressed during the protest; 2) political opportunity structure – volatility within it leads to rational and calculative actions of social actors who want to increase their possibilities (success in achieving the goal depends on the possibility); 3) collective action frames – communication practices and discourses that generate forms of resistance and coping, and mobilize to take action; 4) resource mobilization – the scope of availability of material, organizational, symbolic and cultural resources that are necessary to be able to conduct protest actions (Ekiert

& Kubik, 1997, p. 23). A protest, serving to express disapproval or disagreement with the existing reality, is caused by the heterogeneity of interests or differences in the principles/organization of society. It is a way of shaping public opinion through communication and public relations practices (Adi, 2019), the aim of which is to develop arguments and positions, and use them to influence society and power. Depending on the type of social actors and institutional fields, it can indicate a number of factors that determine this activity. One of the most interesting seems to be the attitude toward religion or religious affiliation. Currently, religion as a dependent variable is rarely taken into account in research on civic participation for at least three reasons. First, it can be seen as a minor, completely private, and intimate matter that has no real impact on the process of constituting active citizenship. Secondly, the progressive transformations in the field of religiosity (leaving the Church and formal religion, apostasy, individualization, and selectivity in terms of beliefs and practices, privatization of religion, and deinstitutionalization of Christianity) lead to the marginalization of the role of religion and the Church, weakening of religious ties and secularization of ideas and institutions. Such transformations include leaving the Church and formal religion, apostasy, individualization, and selectivity in terms of beliefs and practices, privatization of religion, deinstitutionalization and hybridity of Christianity, which means, on the one hand, a combination of folk, national and cultural elements, and on the other hand, subjectivism in the approach to religion, partially interspersed with orthodoxy (Lisak, 2015, p. 41). Thirdly, modernization and postmodernization – which consists of urbanization, industrialization, enrichment, technologization, popularization of education, development of science, progress, and rationalization – question faith in God, deities, and supernatural phenomena and weaken the importance of religion in human life (Norris & Inglehart, 2006, p. 56). Similar trends can be observed in Poland: the percentage of “rather” and “completely” non-believers is increasing – in 2021 it amounted to 12.5%; it is also clearly seen that “the youngest Poland is almost a third non-believer” (CBOS, 2021, p. 13). Nevertheless, as Christopher G.A. Bryant points out, religion can become a factor in strengthening citizenship – “civil nation, civil society, civil religion” (1997, p. 222) constitute an inseparable

triad. Religious faith is broadly related to citizenship: it can be a manner of active citizenship, as believers participate in organized faith communities and social groups, and faith provides guidance on what constitutes a good citizen (Nyhagen & Halsaa, 2016). This seems to be important, especially in the context of women – as Henrietta L. Moore (1997) points out, religion is not only a conservative force determining the fate of women, but various religious groups offer women a legitimate forum for pro-social activities. Jill Dubisch (1995) sees it in a similar way, suggesting that activity in the religious sphere opens the possibility for women to participate in the public sphere. Religion and faith can therefore be perceived as determinants of collective action because they create not only the ideological base but also organizational structures for this type of action.

Protest activity and street politics can be considered the core of active citizenship, its visible and indisputable emanation (it requires not only readiness at the declarative level, but also direct participation). Stimulating this activity is especially important in modern civil societies – it is known that the tendency to protest in post-communist countries is lower (Domański, 2015). Protesting is “proof of democracy” and the practical implementation of democratic principles in force in a state ruled by law – with particular emphasis on free expression of opinion, participation in the process of creating policies, and influencing the decisions of the authorities. This can be done by contesting political decisions, uncompromising attitudes, resistance, manifesting opposition and dissatisfaction, and adopting non-conformist and rebellious attitudes. The right to protest has its constitutional justification: Article 54 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland guarantees freedom of expression; and Article 57, which concerns the organization of peaceful assemblies, provides the following subjective rights: the right to organize an assembly, to participate or not to participate in an assembly, to direct the assembly, the right to protection by the state or public authorities. Public authority may interfere in the course of the assembly only in cases justified by law, in a restrained and non-threatening manner. In addition, the case law of the European Court of Human Rights indicates that the right to protest should be respected as it is part of civil liberties.

Background for research: protests of women in the period 2020–2021

The background for this empirical research are protests that began in Poland on October 22, 2020 after the decision of the Constitutional Tribunal, which revised and made more stringent rules in order to abortion in Poland. This ruling caused a widespread stir and controversy, because Poland until now had one of the most restrictive regulation in this area. The Constitutional Tribunal stated that termination of pregnancy – in the case of suspicion of “severe and irreversible impairment of the fetus or an incurable disease that threatens its life” (Journal of Laws of 1997 No. 9, item 49) – is inconsistent with the Constitution of the Republic of Poland. This premise (i.e. embryopathic pregnancy) was previously recognized as a reason for a legal abortion. On the day of the announcement of the judgment of the Constitutional Tribunal, mass protests and demonstrations began in many towns and villages in Poland and abroad: Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Portugal, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, and even citizens from Australia (www.oko.press). It is estimated that in the capital city itself – during the so-called Great March to Warsaw on October 30 – 100,000 people participated (gazetaprawna.pl). World media and commentators of public life recognized that these were the largest demonstration actions since 1989 (see “The New York Times,” Oct. 30, 2020) – the historic moment when communism in Poland ended and the political transformation began. The protests lasted until December 2020 and take the form of cyclical (every Monday) demonstrations – they are permanently engraved in the collective consciousness and imagination.

Although the research presented here relates only to the protests that took place after the decision of the Constitutional Tribunal in 2020, it should be clearly emphasized that there is a longer history of women’s protests in Poland against systematic attempts to tighten the abortion law. In 2016, two civil bills were submitted to the *Sejm* (a lower house of Polish Parliament), extremely different in their approach to abortion. The first, created by the “Save the women” committee, assumed the liberalization of abortion regulations (legal abortion up to the 12th week, without restrictions) and the second, initiated

by the “Stop abortion” committee – which tightened the regulations, its effect should it be to completely ban abortion, punish who “causes the death of a conceived child,” and for the pregnant woman for using this service. The first draft was rejected with a majority of votes at the first reading, while the second draft was redirected to further parliamentary work (www.wnp.pl). This fact has been interpreted by a large part of the public as a prelude to tightening the regulations and leading to a complete ban on abortion and to penalizing this service. In response to the rejection of the project “Save women” and the procedural continuation of the project “Stop abortion,” in September 2016, a new social movement was created – the National Women’s Strike (OSK) (www.strajkkobiet.eu). Mass protests by women in many Polish cities took place in Poland under the aegis of OSK. The first took place on October 3, 2016 (metaphorically referred to as “Black Monday”) – its leaders were inspired by the 1975 Icelandic women’s rights strike. The protesting women, largely dressed in black, took leave from work or their employer dismissed them from work that day, and simultaneously they did not work in the household. According to estimates, 98,000 people took part in the protest (www.wp.pl). CBOS research (2016) shows that knowledge about the “Black Protests” was declared by 88% of all respondents at that time, which confirms the significance and mass character of this event. At the center of the dispute were not only reproductive rights but also actual and potential motherhood (Kowalska & Nawojski, 2019). At that time, new organizations, communities, and funds were created to facilitate access to abortion. In addition, there were additional forms of mobilizing women – citizenship became a social practice (Korolczuk et al., 2019). In line with the Sejm’s recommendation, the Health Committee, and unofficially – under the influence of social pressure, the Sejm rejected the bill – 352 deputies voted against it, 58 voted against, and 18 abstained (www.wnp.pl). The authorities were surprised by the turn of events, especially the sudden and dynamic social upheaval, so it seemed that the topic of tightening abortion rights would be “frozen” for a long time – in order to maintain the female electorate. The goal was also to not annoy and bother a large part of society – when citizens feel aggrieved, they are more likely to rebel and oppose the authorities. It can therefore be said that the new

legislative foundations were the result of an agreement between the ruling parties and the clergy. As a consequence, the Catholic Church has become a “negative reference group for the participants of the protest,” therefore “the posters and banners of people participating in the protest actions contain criticism of the Christian religion itself, but also objections to the views and statements of its representatives” (Dojwa-Turczyńska, 2019, p. 62). On March 23, 2018, known as “Black Friday,” another large women’s protests took place in many villages, small towns, and big cities – it is estimated that 55,000 people took part in Warsaw alone (wiadomosci.gazeta.pl). The mass of the protest and the scope of its impact caused consternation among the authorities. Finally, the case was referred to the Constitutional Tribunal by MPs from the Law and Justice party (“Prawo i Sprawiedliwość”), Confederation (“Konfederacja”), Kukiz’15. On October 22, 2020, the Constitutional Tribunal issued a ruling in which the only acceptable grounds for legal abortion were: a direct threat to the mother’s health or life and pregnancy as a result of a prohibited act (rape, pedophilia, incest). This ruling triggered an increased wave of further protests, which did not subside for a long time, despite the pandemic, unfavorable weather conditions, suppression of protests by the police, and insulting and stigmatizing people protesting in the media. On January 27, 2021, the Constitutional Tribunal issued a written justification of the judgment, in which it maintains the position.

The background of women’s protest activity outlined above is the starting point for presenting a sociological portrait of female activists in a quantitative dimension, analyzed in reference to their attitude to Christianity. This will show to some extent who is the subject of these protests – how the main social actor is distinguished and how, through his beliefs, dispositions, and actions, he constructs visions of reality; what is the impact of religion and the role of religious identification in this process. So I start by reconstructing the socio-demographic image of an active female citizen in terms of their shared opinions on abortion, and then by focusing on their attitude to the respondents to the Christian religion – recognizing that religion can be a key determinant of participation in protests – thus the goals and expectations related to taking up protest activity. By indicating these motives, it is possible

to understand what was the factor that triggered the protest action; and also what is the direction and purpose of the proposed change or path of emancipation. Including religion in the analysis of women's protests seems interesting because religious content is a component of identity narratives and political ideologies. So it is very likely that social norms and values are created through religion, by the Church.

Methodological note: research problem, hypotheses, data collection technique

Every culture contains a religious aspect (Durkheim, 1990), which causes individuals feel specific moral imperatives that incline them to certain actions, producing a style of thinking and general beliefs about themselves and others. Moreover, as Maria Ossowska writes, religion can influence the content of moral directives (2005, p. 82). Therefore, it is probable that the actions are taken for reasons resulting rather from belonging to a religious community – and thus they are a consequence of collective thinking, existing rules organizing the functioning of this community. On the other hand, individualistic premises, which result from personal needs, independent thinking, and independent reflection, are less important. Pressures and suggestions from the group can be the main reason for some activity – usually, groupthink takes the place of its own, in-depth reflection or is contrary to intuition, emotions, and internal beliefs. Thus, religion can become an impulse both to undertake some activity, but also to refrain from it.

Women's protests – as a significant socio-political event with a large ideological undertone – are a reference plane for marking religion as a determinant of women's civic activity. The attitude towards religion declared by the respondents will reveal the main social actor in an axionormative dimension. Research shows the relationship between religious affiliation and opinion on abortion among protest participants. This, in turn, will allow us to make assumptions about the preferred axionormative systems – what values the protest participants have, and how they hierarchize and implement them. Next, the main motives for women's participation in the protests will

be indicated. By focusing on the causes, one can answer the question of what causes participation in protests, and what issues will become the subject of women's rights in the future.

The research questions posed in this study are as follows: 1) how do the women who took part in the protests identify themselves in terms of religion? 2) what is their opinion on abortion – depending on declared religious affiliation or non-affiliation (lack of identification with any religion); 3) what are the reasons for participating in the protest – presented in the context of the attitude towards Christianity. Suggested answers to the research questions are contained in the following hypotheses. Hypothesis 1: the largest percentage of protesters are women who do not declare a relationship with Christianity in terms of beliefs and practices. Hypothesis 2: the reasons for the participation of women in the protests will be identical or similar, regardless of the declared religious affiliation (and will refer to the right to choose and to make decisions). Hypothesis 3: protesting women demand the legalization of abortion based on statutory premises, in accordance with the procedure provided for in common law.

The verification of the hypotheses will show how religious beliefs can accelerate or block women's protest activity. It can be concluded that thinking about abortion depends directly on the beliefs resulting from religious affiliation. Thus, full identification with Christianity is accompanied by a radicalized approach to abortion, increasing punitiveness, and opposing its legalization (which remains consistent with the social teaching of the Church). On the other hand, weak or no identification with religion results in full or moderate acceptance of the availability of abortion in Poland. Therefore, it should be recognized that the attitude towards religion is one of the most important determinants of women's participation in these strikes and, at the same time, constitutes the axis of division between pro- and anti-abortion attitudes.

The study was conducted among adult (18+) women who took an active and personal part in street protests against the tightening of abortion law. So the criterion for recruiting to the group and surveying was participation in at least one of several dozen protests that lasted in the period October–December

2020. A non-probabilistic purposive sample was used for the research - sample selection was done via websites, forums, and discussion groups, where the topic related to women's strikes appeared. In addition to gender, the following socio-demographic aspects were taken into inter alia account: age and level of education. The characteristics of the study population, in relation to the above-mentioned aspects, are presented in the Table 1 below:

Table 1. Characteristics of the study population

Socio-demographic aspects	Respondent group
AGE	
18–25 years	17.95%
26–35 years	30.94%
36–45 years	25.13%
46–60 years	18.29%
61 and older	7.69%
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	
Primary	0.86%
Vocational	0.51%
Secondary	24.79%
Higher	73.85%

Source: Author's research.

The research was carried out as part of an individual research project entitled *Citizenship of Women in Urban Democracy* (reference: WPBU/2020/05/00130). Empirical data was collected via the internet surveying technique (computer-assisted web interview – CAWI). This study was based on a script posted on a website containing a collection of questions to which the respondents answered. The advantage of this approach was the high availability of respondents (according to the Central Statistical Office, 90.4% of Poles had access to the internet in 2020), hence – a high response rate. This approach turned out to be the right choice of research technique, especially since the pandemic conditions limited the possibility of direct and close interpersonal contacts.

After excluding invalid or incomplete cases, the data set consists of the answers of 585 respondents (N = 585). The CAWI survey included questions about the motives for participating in the protests; the expected effects of the protest; at the same time, the survey included the respondents' beliefs about abortion and the selected dependent variable, which is religiousness defined as an attitude towards Christianity (since it is the dominant religion in Poland). The respondents had the opportunity to self-identify (in relation to Christianity) on the basis of the following options: believer and practitioner, believer but not practice, follower of another religion/believer in another God, or non-believer.

The responsive nature of these studies, which results from the conscious participation of respondents, made it possible to collect a lot of data creating not only the socio-demographic profile but also the research allowed to determine the relationships between the indicated variable. The conducted analysis led to the formulation of idiographic conclusions that explain what motives and decisions are behind the protest activity; what are the main goals and rationale behind this activity; what demographic features stimulate this activity. The fact of personal participation in the protest can be seen as an expression of civic subjectivity, awareness of civic rights, and the need to defend them; as a testimony to real commitment in the public sphere, the ability to decide on the direction of political activities, and to influence decision-makers by expressing objections, reluctance or contestation against their decisions and resolutions. At the same time, one can risk a statement that active participation in a protest assumes the potential possibility of a similar action in the future, and thus – the creation of a new political community or social movement.

Results

The indicator taken into account in the research was the attitude of the respondents to the Christianity. It is a monotheistic religion, based on Holy Scripture and Apostolic Tradition, with the most followers in the world. Although the main branches of Christianity, apart from Catholicism, should

also include Protestantism and Orthodoxy, Catholicism in the case of Poland must be treated as the main point of reference, because it is the most numerous and significant creed, one can even say that it is a typical belief system. Thus separating this indicator seems to be particularly important due to the structure and culture of Polish society, as well as the way it is organized (through general patterns of action, roles, statuses, positions, and social relations). Compared to many European countries, Poland is a Christian country in which the influence of religion and Catholic institutions and related agencies on public affairs is very clear. As a result of the expansion of the Church in the public sphere, “political Catholicism” or “Catholicism as a political institution” was born (Grabowska, 2009, p. 294), which means that it repeatedly affects the functioning of law, administration, and everyday life. The high position of the Christian religion and its impact on non-religious elements of the social system is a simple consequence of the declarations of the majority of Poles belonging to this religion and giving it a special, soteriological rank. Thus, religion legitimizes the social order by referring to the dominant axiology and using Christian values to design the general system of moral obligations, norms, societal standards, and even common law. Reference to Christian values is made by separating from secular axiological concepts, in which identical or similar values (e.g. goodness, righteousness, justice, compassion) are derived from sources other than the Christian religion. All this means that we are dealing with two separate systems (religious and laic or atheistic), which – depending on the perspective – are valorized differently and rather compete with each other than cooperate. Against the backdrop of this division, politics is conducted and a struggle for influence is waged.

The attitude of citizens towards religion and the Church is constantly evolving: in the opinion of 67%, the Catholic Church in Poland is too involved in politics and evaluates it negatively; and 82% say the Church should remain neutral towards politics (ciekaweliczby.pl). Nevertheless, the scheme of reciprocity between the Church and the state authorities seems unquestionable, which is explained by concern for the fate of citizens and public order. In the interpenetration process an important role plays the “social doctrine of the Church,” which formulates relations in the public sphere,

and is the axis connecting the Catholic worldview and politics (Raciborski, 1997, pp. 225–226), therefore, the Christian doctrine, having a theological background, defines the moral rules of everyday life, becomes a criterion for evaluating conduct as good/worthy and bad/unworthy. In accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Poland (Article 25): “relations between the state and churches and other religious associations are shaped on the basis of respect for their autonomy and mutual independence of each in its own sphere, as well as cooperation for the good of man and the common good.” However, the separation of state and church seems rather seeming, as the voice of the church is taken into account at the state level, especially in the area of sexuality and family planning. The consequence is the restrictive anti-abortion law, the lack of reimbursement of contraceptives or limited access to them (as in the case of the morning-after pill), the non-acceptance of in vitro fertilization, and the illegalization of non-traditional, alternative family models – in particular homosexual relationships. Numerous controversies are also caused by the “conscience clause,” which can be used by representatives of medical professions in a situation of refusal to perform duties resulting from their profession and labor law, if in their subjective opinion, the provision of a health service is dishonest and immoral. Magdalena Środa, showing the destructive influence of the Catholic religion on the situation of women in society, writes that Catholicism in Poland is something more than a way of being, a criterion for evaluating others, an element of fashion, a tool of power, and censorship – it is the basis of the dominant educational model and social relations that depreciates a woman (Środa, 2007, p. 654). The Church largely creates the social roles assigned to the sexes and maintains the traditional divisions between male and female domains. Church discourse may block the active participation of women in the public sphere, because women in the message of the doctrine of the church and in the church institution itself have an oppressed status, and are stereotypically perceived in terms of wife and mother, who are mainly assigned functions servant, procreative, carer, and educator. Due to prejudices and unequal treatment, women may experience many other restrictions, marginalization, or discrimination by church institutions and the authority that creates this system and defines its norms and

practices. The systematic oppression of women is the result of rigid church rules, which are justified by centuries-old tradition and eternal natural law. An alliance between the altar and the patriarchy – as Jose Casanova writes – generates obstacles in the process of women’s emancipation, therefore “the need to advance and protect gender equality and women’s rights to become the most common normative justification for secularism today” (Casanova, 2009, p. 42). Regardless of the degree of interdependence of religion with the public sphere in which feminine civic activity can manifest itself, it should be noted that women’s rights are respected more often where religion has no influence on politics.

In the light of research, more than half of the protesters (55.04%) are non-believers; 32.14% are believers and non-practitioners; 7.18% are believers and practitioners; while 5.64% believe in a different god and are followers of a different (non-Catholic) religion. The declarations obtained in the research allow us to state that these protests united mainly those who are not active members of the church community, they remain indifferent or probably negate the Christian doctrine and the norms and values resulting from it. It can be assumed that this group sees the church as an oppressive institution that wants to exercise power over women by controlling their sexuality and reproduction. Thus, the majority of protesters reject or do not share Christian values, but profess values that are not related to religion or are not directly derived from it. Robert K. Merton emphasizes that the unity of society is created through shared goals and rules that are not necessarily and not always related to religion; moreover, there are cases where there is a great contradiction between religion and other non-religious values in general held by many (see: Merton, 1982, p. 101). The Polish Women’s Strike is a clear illustration of this because the values to which this protest invoked were derived from secular ethical systems, which rationalize efforts to maximize women’s rights or minimize church interference in their intimate and personal choices. It is a fact that the Catholic Church views abortion as a grave sin that violates the fifth commandment of the Decalogue – “do not kill.” This conviction is also upheld in the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* – according to which abortion is a crime, “the murder of innocent beings,” and a Catholic cannot claim and support the legal permis-

sibility of termination of pregnancy (www.vatican.va). The above-mentioned religious argumentation is of great importance in Polish society, as it is conservative and Catholic – 91.9% of Poland's inhabitants declare their affiliation to the Roman Catholic Church (www.sta.gov.pl). On the other hand, moral conservatism is manifested in the professing of traditional values – such as family, authority, nation, religion, patriarchy, and natural law. Conservative ideology is considered crucial in talking about family, sex, contraception, procreation, pregnancy, and upbringing. At the same time, this conservatism perpetuates the traditional family model, the acceptance of masculine patterns, and the dichotomous division of gender roles – based on biological roles and patriarchal gender stereotypes and beliefs that legitimize the dominant position of men. Long-term, unconscious, and unnamed functioning in the patriarchal structure and culture may result in the depletion of personal and public resources necessary to undertake and continue collective actions, the expiration of women's potential political subjectivity and agency, the weakening of the ability to influence the government, and also the deprivation of the right to make a conscious choice between value systems and held accountable for it.

On the basis of the self-declarations presented above regarding the attitude towards religion, the respondents were asked about their opinion on the admissibility of abortion. In general, in the group of respondents, a high compliance level can be indicated in the cases of the following statements: a) termination of pregnancy should be allowed when the pregnancy threatens the life of the mother; b) termination of pregnancy should be allowed when the pregnancy resulted from a prohibited act: rape, incest, intercourse with a minor; c) termination of pregnancy should be allowed when the fetus is irreversibly damaged, severely handicapped or has a genetic defect. In the above-mentioned cases, the level of compliance is 4.983 on a scale of 5.0. However, in the case of the next statement: access to abortion should be universal, it can be seen that religion is a factor that differentiates views. Thus, women who describe themselves as believers and practitioners agree with the statement of full availability of abortion on level 3.02 (medium-low). This interesting correlation is presented in the Chart 1.

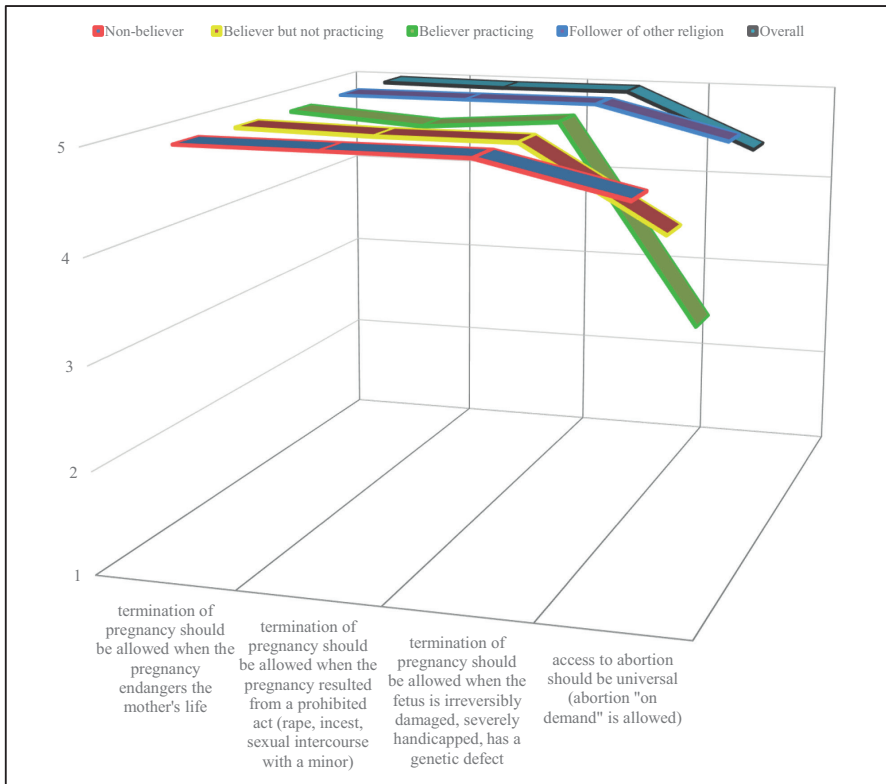


Chart 1. Respondents' opinions on the admissibility of abortion

Source: Author's research.

The probable reason is the resounding religious message that abortion is a sin, so it would be difficult to justify and forgive this sin if it was not supported by some rationalization. If there is no external cause, the dominant way of thinking and evaluating is religious exemplification. It can be assumed that, according to the respondents, abortion does not seem justified when it can be perceived as a fully individual decision resulting from subjective and personal reasons, when arguments and external forces do not occur at all or appear only to a limited extent. Abortion, as a conscious and deliberate choice of the individual, is an overly radical proposition, not only because it contradicts religious interpretation, but also because it undermines moral absolutism,

which assumes that the truth about something is one and unchangeable. This axionorative rigidity remains in opposition to the freedom of belief of other people (thinking differently) and causes the inability to change one's own opinions. It seems that religion, by designing a specific framework for thinking and evaluating, reinforces this rigidity and conformism, especially in ambiguous situations. In addition, another reason for the deviation noticeable in the study may be the conflict of values and moral dissonance. Their source is a "crack" within the axionormative system and being in a situation of an unobvious choice (usually the "lesser evil"). This is an ethical dilemma – a choice between two equivalent options when indicating either of them is never fully satisfactory and is not fully consistent with the individual's worldview, their sensitivity, and the hierarchy of preferred values. This moral dissonance, nevertheless, can only be the result of an ideological impact – then it does not result from the actual contradiction of values, but results from indirect reasons (such as inducing guilt in order to gain advantage and control, maintaining a sense of inferiority and being in a sin that can only be forgiven by selected people – i.e. priest confessor). Similarly, this conflict of values can be initiated deliberately in order to become the object of group antagonism on social and ideological grounds.

It can be argued that in the case of women's protests, the religious factor is closely related to political preferences. Religion, as a system of beliefs and practices, shapes political orientations and electoral behavior (Esmer & Pettersson, 2010; Lipset, 1995). As Seymour M. Lipset points out, in a multi-religious country where religious divisions and distances between believers and non-believers are visible, it is religion that can decide about support for a given party (1995, p. 236). Mark Juergensmeyer, Dinah Griego and John Soboslai write: „In many cases, traditional religion had become politicized, in some cases fused with right-wing nationalism, as traditional leaders led the charge against pluralism and secularism and, in an era in which the nation-state is under siege, saw an opportunity for nationalism to be buttressed by religious ideologies and institutions” (2015, p. 2). The Church can become a bridgehead of the party and support its activities and programs in a demonstrative way – in the past, the Church has repeatedly mobilized various groups and circles

to establish parties that “defended” society against left-wing or anti-clerical political movements (Lipset, 1995, p. 259). The interdependence and reciprocity between the church and politics are visible in Polish society, and is the aftermath of the cycle of changes after 1989, when the newly established parties needed the recognition and support of serious political actors, such as the Church and “Solidarity.” The right-wing tried to gain the favor of the Church, so it offered to introduce such changes that were in line with the will of the clergy – for example: teaching religion in schools, hanging crosses in public places, emphasizing Christian values in laws or other normative acts, and above all limiting access to the abortion. The simple consequence of this is the current situation. The Church seems to favor the right-wing and distance itself from the liberal-left circles that postulate the full right to a legal and safe abortion. It should be noted, that the relationship is doubly complex: research on political orientations among female respondents confirms that the fewest women who participated in the protests declared right-wing views (Tomczyk, 2022). The worldview and the sphere of values are determined mainly by religion and politics - religious and political identification are clearly and systematically connected with the attitude toward abortion.

The next aspect that can explain the participation of women in the protests is the main motivations of the respondents. Recognizing the motivations (the reasons that guided and sustained the behavior of the respondents) is important because it illustrates the internalized cultural content that is important and valued by the respondents. The reasons for the protests were personal (private) and public (with the intention of acting for the benefit of the public, on behalf of other women). The need to participate in the protests was not stimulated by material benefits, but the reasons were autotelic and ideological. Generally, the indicated motives for participating in the protests are as follows (the maximum value of the scale is 5.0): I see the necessity and the need to decide for myself (4.98); I believe that power interferes with my personal life and intimacy (4.97); I believe that my civil rights are being violated (4.97); the Court’s ruling violates my freedom and dignity (4.96); the judgment of the Court is not applied, I do not agree with it (4.94); I show solidarity with other women (4.92); I fight for democracy (4.85); I believe

that abortion is a woman’s right (4.83). In addition to these motivations, other accompanying factors were also taken into account, perhaps less political and formal, and related to the atmosphere of protest, community building, or being in a group of people. So there were also motivations: I can scream and reveal my emotions (2.09); I like happenings and protests (2.39); the protests have a cheerful, relaxed atmosphere (2.21); I always take part in protests, regardless of what they are about (2.09); I like the bustle when there is a lot going on (1.43); because of the need to go outside, meet friends and acquaintances (1.32); in the current situation it is a good way to spend free time (1.22); no reason (1.18); boredom, lack of entertainment (1:11).

When we combine the above-mentioned reasons for participating in the protest with religious self-identification, we can notice a fairly large convergence of views. The issue that shows variation is “I believe abortion is a woman’s right.” This can be seen in the Chart 2.

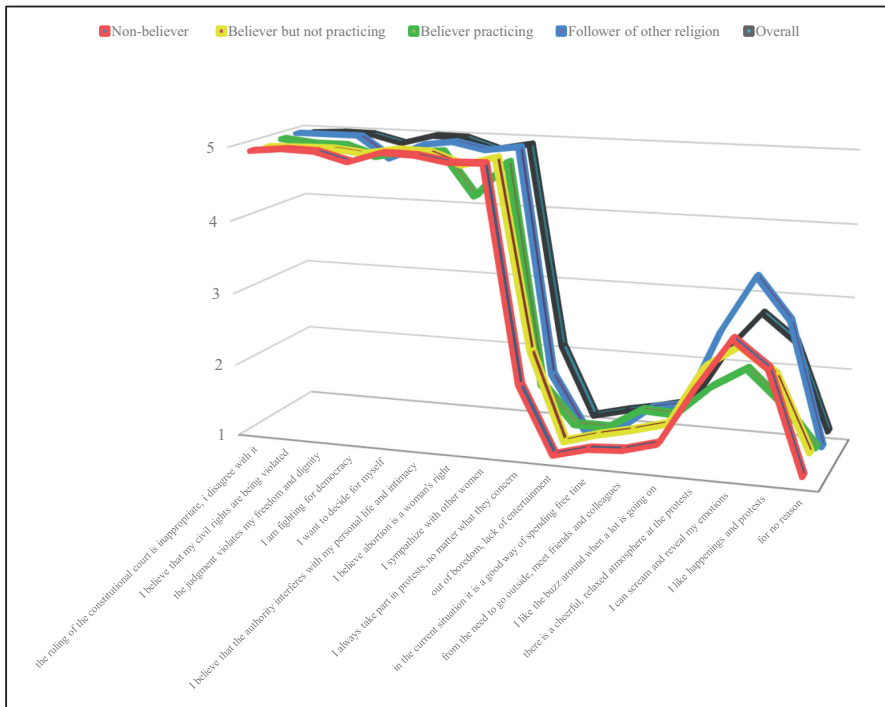


Chart 2. Respondents’ reasons to participate in the protests

Source: Author’s research.

Women describing themselves as “non-believers” agreed with this statement in the range of 4.91, while women “believing and practicing” – 4.31. Although the difference is not spectacular, it suggests that the understanding of women’s rights may differ depending on religious affiliation. It is also probable that women associated with the Church and faith have not fully internalized the content of women’s rights – they do not understand and do not accept them, which is why they do not externalize them in their everyday activities. It should also be added that the term “women’s rights” itself does not appear in the church narrative in its prototypical sense, and perhaps it is a word “accursed,” forbidden, pejorative, the use of which threatens exclusion from the center of the church community. Religion can therefore be regarded as a destimulant in the process of institutionalizing women’s rights, whose affirmation and development are essential for emancipation and social change. It seems, therefore, that civic activity analyzed in the context of religiosity indicates not only differences in beliefs about abortion but also constitutes a delimiting line between supporters of the traditional social order (with strengthened church authority) and those who question this order and strive for emancipation understood as the effect of the declining control of the church over the everyday life of citizens (Kaufmann, 2007). The process of emancipation is also about the rejection of fundamentalist and oppressive beliefs, because designing a system of values can never be the prerogative of the dominant religion.

Conclusions

The data contained in the article indicate that religion (religious identification) may have a real impact on civic activity of a protest nature. Religion is a mobilizing or demobilizing factor – it leads to the decision to undertake such activity, refrain from it or boycott it if the goal is contrary to the religious doctrine. The theoretical discussion, and especially the results of shown above research, lead to the conclusion that participation in the protest against the tightening of the abortion law is ideologically dependent. The protest was attended mainly by atheists who reject faith in any god. However, it is not cer-

tain whether the fact of low strike participation among women who describe themselves as believers and practitioners results from an internal conviction that abortion is morally negative and sinful or such a lack of involvement in this matter is a consequence of the teaching of the Church and the position of the clergy on this subject. In this context, it should be noted that the empirical data obtained in this study rather exclude a simple and unambiguous division within the female population into two ideologically opposing groups. So, on the one hand, women who do not believe in God, do not have a religious identification, who demand the right to abortion and who are supporters of open access to this service. And on the other hand, women for whom the belief and practice of religion is an element of identity – and therefore would never terminate their pregnancy. Well, as the survey of abortion patients in the USA shows, 62% of women who had an abortion confirmed their religious affiliation (Jermain et al., 2016). It can therefore be argued that there is often a discrepancy between the declared axiological attitude (religiously motivated) and its implementation in private life, in relation to a specific situation, in making personal choices. Total subordination to the values and principles proclaimed by the Church can lead to conformism, which prevents civil disobedience or other forms of expressing opposition to authority. In addition, there may be a fear of stigmatization (as “sinful woman,” or “bad Christian”) or apprehension of anathema or exclusion from a religious community. This is because “abortion stigma confounds a woman’s decision to terminate a pregnancy due to worries about judgment, isolation, self-judgment, and community condemnation” (Frohworth et al., 2018, p. 385). Qualitative research – individual in-depth interviews with women who have had abortions – shows that this stigma is internalized in two ways: as a tribal stigma and as a character flaw (Cockrill & Nack, 2013). Women are convinced that they are damned, immoral, vile, marked by evil. The experience of stigma and harsh judgment arises from contact with partners, family members, health professionals and anyone who knows about abortion.

The topic of the protest was abortion, which is not a neutral ideological issue. Differences in the perception and assessment of abortion are therefore the result of the systematic shaping of views by the Catholic Church, as well

as of contrasting axiological assumptions, different understanding of such concepts as embryo, fetus, pregnancy, maternity, and reproductive rights. For a large part of society, moral norms remain to a large extent identical to religious norms – they are at the same time strongly internalized and often thoughtlessly reproduced. It seems that religious content is fragmentarily realized by an individual and reproduced in some simplified formula – most often through the prism of one’s own experiences, omitting the experiences and perspectives of others. It cannot be ruled out that the values resulting from women’s rights are not recognized and respected by Polish women who are socialized in a conservative spirit. Moral conservatism manifests itself in adhering to traditional values – such as family, power, nation, religion, patriarchy, and natural law (this is accompanied by intolerance of ambiguity, radicalism, and rigidity of beliefs). Conservative ideology is considered crucial in conversations about family, sex, contraception, procreation, pregnancy, and upbringing. At the same time, this conservatism defines the socio-cultural role and position of a woman and determines her potential political subjectivity, decision-making, and agency.

Indicating religion as a determinant of women’s civic activity in the protest dimension seems to be a fact. The subject of further reflection may be the question to what extent religious identification is a source, trigger or effect of civic action. It may be that religious identification automatically influences beliefs, decisions, and choices of an individual – framing their worldview and axionormative system. Or, on the contrary: people, being subject to numerous ideological influences, take actions opposing them in order to indicate their disagreement or to articulate and pursue interests that they consider important to themselves or others. It is these two attitudes that seem to be empirical evidence suggesting that the attitude towards religion is always a mediating variable in the formation of women’s active citizenship.

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